

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SOFIA 001598

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

FBIHQ FOR OIO/EURASIAN UNIT/BARRY BRAUN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV KCRM ASEC PINR BU

SUBJECT: BULGARIA: CHARISMATIC INTERIOR MINISTRY CHIEF RESIGNS

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Interior Ministry Chief Secretary General Boiko Borisov, one of Bulgaria's most popular officials, submitted his resignation September 14, citing planned legislative amendments that significantly curbed his position's powers. In a letter to the President and the PM, Borisov said his job at the ministry had become meaningless as planned changes to the Interior Ministry Act removed many of his powers, including the exchange of information with international organizations. Borisov's resignation comes less than a month after the new Socialist-led coalition government took over on August 22. The new Minister of Interior, former deputy Socialist-party leader Rumen Petkov, made clear that unlike his predecessor, he would not remain in the shadow of the highly-popular General. Petkov previewed Borisov's resignation during a September 14 meeting with Amb. Beyrle (septel). The government of Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev is expected to accept Borisov's resignation September 15. Borisov's decision made front page headlines in Bulgaria amid mounting speculations that he may enter politics and run for a Mayor of Sofia in the October 29 by-election. END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) In his resignation letter, Borisov said that if the draft Interior Ministry Act is adopted, the functions of the ministry's political leadership will duplicate those of the Chief Secretary. The proposed changes broaden the powers of the political leadership at the expense of the professionals, Borisov wrote, noting that the minister will have five deputies, while the Chief Secretary will have none. "Given the upcoming changes at the Interior Ministry, there is no place for me there," Borisov said, adding that his opinion on the bill had not been taken into account. He said he and Petkov had tried to work as a team but it didn't work out. Petkov, an influential figure in the ruling Socialist Party, had put an end to frequent media appearances by Borisov, whose popularity is in large measure a result of cultivating a press corps that could not seem to get enough of the charismatic general.

¶3. (SBU) The draft Interior Ministry Act, initiated by the Ministry's political leadership, is reportedly an attempt to boost the efficiency of the ministry's work and achieve a better coordination of its services. A significant change from the current law is that while the Chief Secretary reportedly retains his formal coordinating functions, all police and MoI intelligence services will be under the direct supervision of the Minister. In addition, all police services would be gathered into one structure, the National Police Service. Its director, as well as the heads of the counter-intelligence and firefighting services would report directly to the minister. Currently, the operation of the services under the Ministry are coordinated by the Chief Secretary. In general, the new law, expected to be passed by parliament in October, shifts the balance of power towards the ministry's political leadership.

¶4. (SBU) Borisov, 46, was appointed to the position of Interior Ministry Chief Secretary in September 2001 by former Prime Minister Simeon Saxe-Coburg for whom he served as a bodyguard before the ex-king took over as PM in July 2001. Borisov, who enjoys near-heroic status in Bulgaria, constantly led opinion polls over the past four years due to his Armani-clad tough guy image and close ties with local media, this despite his overall ineffectiveness against organized crime. He did not miss an opportunity to boast about successful police operations, especially stressing his ties with the Western police and intelligence services. To his credit, he was exceptionally cooperative with U.S. law enforcement on a number of specific cases, none of which involved major Bulgarian organized crime figures. His high profile under the previous government was in contrast to the former Minister's near invisibility. In a sense, Borisov was filling a vacuum. His opponents, however, point to his past connections with strong-arm groups and unsavory business interests.

¶5. (SBU) Speculation was rife over the past weeks as to whether Borisov would run for mayor of Sofia in the October 29 by-election. Borisov said September 15 he would announce his decision in the coming days. In June, he ran for parliament on the ticket of Saxe-Coburg's National Movement

Simeon II and won MP mandates in two electoral regions, but gave up his seat in Parliament to retain his Interior Ministry job.

BEYRLE